

Trees

Published 2/13/20 – Public domain image titled “Cedar Tree Drawing” by Georg Dionys Ehret (1708-1770) from reusableart.com

From the first day of this column I’ve wanted to write about the value of trees, but not in a clinical way. Yet I lack all of the talent to present something the way Joyce Kilmer did so I struggled with what and how to say it. What follows is that attempt.

First I will state the obvious, our area is not natural tree habitat. Growing up in coastal California, I had the distinct advantage of being able to drive a few hours north and see coastal redwoods, some of the tallest trees in the world, drive east and see the giant sequoias which are the biggest trees in the world, and to the southeast grew Joshua trees which are some of the oldest trees in the world.

Yes in central South Dakota we have a few species that naturally occur in swales and valleys and in protected areas along water ways. But in flat, open areas very few, if any, trees are naturally found. The State Historical Society museum on Governors Drive has plenty of displays and pictures that show how few trees were present even only a couple of generations ago. Mainly because of the lack of naturally growing trees, we are very protective of our existing trees. Each time a big tree is removed there is usually sorrow and regret. The new tree is then carefully watched as it starts to grow into the space left by it’s predecessor.

Wildlife’s use of the new tree starts almost immediately as well. Last summer I planted a magnolia tree outside our main gate at work that has a canopy not much larger than a laundry basket. Within three days of it being put in the ground, a pair of eastern kingbirds decided that would be a perfect place to raise a family, which they successfully did over the next few months.

Diversity of our urban forest is important. When a tree needs replacing, see what your neighbors have and plant something different. Without diversity the consequences can be a tough lesson as many will find out when the Emerald Ash Borer gets to our city.

Humans leave many signs of our existence on the landscape, some positive, some negative, some intentional, some unintentional. Certainly one of the positives is to plant trees. A 2019 report stated that compared to the previous year there was over a 7% increase in trees in our state. That’s a great number, and as far as goals go in my opinion a repeat of that is about as good as it can get.

I will conclude with the help of Joyce Kilmer’s (1886 — 1918) — Trees:

I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest against the earth’s sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day, and lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear a nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain; who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.



Art Smith is a co-owner of East Pierre Landscape and Garden Center, 5400 SD Hwy 34, Pierre